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Statement by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination[1] to the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit herewith the statement by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination to the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

[1] Formerly the Administrative Committee on Coordination.

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Introduction

1. The executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations system strongly welcome the World Summit on Sustainable Development and attach great importance to its successful outcome. They join together in the hope that world leaders gathering in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002, will build on the political momentum of the Millennium Summit and inject a renewed focus on the global partnership that is indispensable to the advancement of sustainable development.

Towards sustainable development

2. In the past decade both donor and recipient countries have devoted vast amounts of resources to the task of sustaining development at all levels, notably under the unifying framework of Agenda 21. The executive heads especially acknowledge the positive impact of legislative and regulatory reforms by Governments of developed and developing countries that have led to stronger national policy frameworks for sustainable development, including innovative fiscal measures intended to change national production and consumption patterns.

3. Civil society and the corporate sector have also broadened and deepened their roles in the implementation of Agenda 21, with important initiatives and actions for sustainable development within their own spheres of economic, social and commercial activities.

4. Within the United Nations system, member organizations have launched diverse partnership initiatives with Member States aimed at strengthening the human, institutional, technical and productive capacities of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to pursue sustainable development consistent with their national frameworks.

5. At the same time, rapid developments in technology, communication and global trade have raised new issues that need to be addressed. The international community is thus called upon to evolve new and more dynamic strategies for sustaining global development and balancing modern economic growth, promoting social well-being and pursuing the prudent management of the environment in a more holistic and synergistic manner, especially considering certain unresolved environmental matters identified a decade ago. Although much has already been achieved, progress has notably fallen short in building sustainable societies through the effective integration of the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable development into modern day-to-day decision-making. This reinforces the urgent need for capacity-building in the areas of integrated analysis and decision-making.

Challenges

6. The executive heads underscore the reality that overcoming existing barriers to sustainable development is particularly difficult for developing countries, especially the least developed countries and small island developing States.

7. One of the main challenges is to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all the world's people. While it has often led to faster growth and higher living standards, its benefits are unevenly distributed both among and within countries. Efforts to promote global trade and financial liberalization have tended to overlook social and environmental objectives. For many societies, globalization has come to mean increased social, economic and ecological vulnerabilities. At the same time, trade distortions, particularly in the agricultural sector, continue to limit market access for exports from developing countries.

8. Protection of public health is another factor, particularly in reference to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The HIV/AIDS problem has spread far and wide, constituting, along with other diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis, a serious impediment to economic and social progress. It threatens to undermine the entire development process in sub-Saharan Africa, while also affecting development prospects in other developing regions.

9. Hunger and poverty, especially in rural areas, have increased in intensity in many developing countries, signalling the weaknesses of national poverty programmes in the face of global development. In these countries, women and children suffer disproportionately.

10. The pressures of population growth and rapid urbanization and, in some cases, war and political conflict, continue to hamper the provision of adequate infrastructure and services in developing countries,

especially housing, health care, education, safe drinking water, sanitation, energy, waste management and transportation.

11. Environmental concerns constitute a large block of interrelated issues that pose real challenges to sustainable development, as a healthy environment is a prerequisite for economic growth and social equity. In this regard, the unabated emission of greenhouse gases, despite growing scientific evidence of its linkages to climate change, the upsurge in natural disasters involving not only natural forces but also inappropriate development choices and environmental degradation, deforestation, drought and desertification, degradation and loss of agricultural land, loss of biodiversity, threats to coral reefs and fish stocks, marine pollution and increasing scarcity of freshwater resources, are just a few of the many interrelated environmental issues that need urgent attention.

12. Not least among the emerging factors is the limited extent of technology transfer, including the introduction of energy-efficient and other environmentally sound technologies to developing countries. Progress in the use of new information technologies by developing countries in the emerging digital economy is still too slow.

13. The executive heads also call attention to an all-important factor that greatly diminishes the positive impact of sustainable development policies and practices — the unforgiving debt burden facing many developing countries. High interest payments, along with the continuing decline in official development assistance, have severely constrained the ability of most developing countries to provide basic services and invest in growth that could sustain development.

Summit of renewed action

14. The Summit meeting offers a timely opportunity to re-energize ongoing efforts within the framework of Agenda 21. It is hoped that world leaders will seize this unique opportunity to focus on specific initiatives that can synergistically and collectively address poverty eradication, social development, food security, sustained economic growth and the protection and conservation of natural resources and ecosystems. It is imperative that such initiatives enjoy the support of all concerned actors and stakeholders at both the national and international levels so as to ensure ownership and guarantee success.

15. The executive heads are committed, in close cooperation with the international community, to launching a new era of shared global responsibility for sustainable development consistent with their respective mandates.

16. The key Millennium Declaration goal of halving, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's people living in poverty and the proportion of people suffering from hunger (see General Assembly resolution 55/2, sect. III), will require strongly focused and highly coordinated sustainable development strategies. Well-functioning partnership arrangements are thus necessary to ensure that timely and strategic action is taken by all concerned.

17. Broader support and sustained efforts to promote participatory and accountable governance, the empowerment of women and mobilization of substantial, new and additional financial resources for sustainable development, including through the timely implementation of the enhanced programme of debt relief for the heavily indebted poor countries and reinvigoration of the commitment to the 0.7 per cent official development assistance target, would go a long way towards furthering sustainable development.

18. The World Summit offers the political leaders of both developed and developing countries, as well as stakeholders in government, civil society, the corporate sector, labour unions and the United Nations system member organizations, an opportunity to join hands and:

(a) Promote greater mutual understanding that a transparent, non-discriminatory and rule-based multilateral trading system and greater access to global markets by developing countries, including duty- and quota-free access for exports from the least developed countries, are fully compatible with the objectives of sustainable development;

(b) Exert their best efforts to achieve a consensus for the early entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol, intensify at the same time efforts to implement recently adopted recommendations on energy for sustainable development, proactively pursue policies designed to strengthen national capacities in disaster prevention and response to major natural and human-caused environmental disasters and promote

stronger regional and multilateral cooperation agreements in this sphere;

(c) In the framework of increasing global competitiveness and productivity, call for practical commitments to intensify efforts to remove supply-side constraints and develop competitive productive capacities, promote the transfer of and access to protected technology by developing countries, fully exploit technology in the public domain and induce national institutions in developing countries to strengthen their own technological and scientific inventiveness;

(d) Integrate more effectively environmental, social, cultural and economic concerns in policy formulation and implementation through existing national coordination frameworks and mechanisms;

(e) Ensure more responsive policy formulation and greater policy coherence to support the planning and implementation of national programmes of action for sustainable development.

The executive heads also take this opportunity to renew their commitment to inter-agency cooperation at the policy, programme and field levels with a view to achieving a fully coordinated United Nations approach to sustainable development.